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# Census Bureau Seeks Partners in Business

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# Census Bureau seeks partners in business

By now you should have seen the advertisements for the U.S. Census Bureau to apprise us of the forthcoming census on April 1, 2000. And there will be plenty more since the Bureau has budgeted \$167 million on this push for public awareness, something it has never previously paid to do.

The message being sent by the Bureau is the importance of being counted. And when the 120 million questionnaires go out in the mail next March, the message will be the necessity to return them. Since the response rate of returned questionnaires has steadily gone down from 78 percent in 1970 to 65 percent in 1990 and is projected to be 55 percent in this census, the Bureau is seeking to counteract that by making a concerted effort to increase the return rate. Thus an advertising blitz which is going out in 18 languages.

More than just the advertising are the other two areas in which the Bureau has directed its efforts: schools and partnerships.

Besides distributing to schools a plethora of readings, maps, lesson plans and data that can be used at different grade levels, the Bureau will provide most of this material in quantity to individual teachers for their classes. The hope is that these materials will get into the homes of students so that parents will see the importance of responding to the questionnaires. Further, the materials will be extremely valuable in the teaching

process, with direct application to geography, mathematics, history, civics and other related areas.

But the Number 1 Priority for Census 2000 is partnerships, the third area being targeted by the Bureau. The Bureau plans to partner with state, local and tribal governments, with national and community organizations, with the media, and with businesses.

The purpose of partnering is simple: The Bureau has difficulty doing it all alone. This census will be the largest peacetime governmental operation since World War II. At its peak the Bureau will employ nearly 300,000 workers. And counting and tabulating data for 275 million people is no simple task, even though five of six households will answer only seven questions, the shortest questionnaire in 180 years, while the sixth of those households will tackle an additional 27 questions.

There is also a time constraint. Numbers for each state must be given to the Congress by December 31, 2000, with counts of geographic areas, including cities and towns, distributed one year after the census on April 1, 2001. And then the details of the number

crunching will take place over the years as these numbers are reassembled, interpreted and analyzed.

As our population gets larger and we have increasing numbers of new people in

the nation, it becomes increasingly difficult to count everyone. In 1990, for example, there

was an undercount of four million, with more than one-half this number comprising children. And much of the undercount occurred in cities with their heavy concentrations of immigrants and minorities. It is estimated that 5 percent of Hispanics and over 4 percent of Blacks were not counted. As a result cities lost not only federal dollars but also political influence.

South Carolina estimates that it lost more than \$3 billion in federal aid over the decade because of an undercount. In California officials estimated an undercount of 800,000 in that state of 30 million population, and with their estimate that the state loses \$100 in federal dollars per person per year not counted, the state lost \$80 million each year for the decade.

Closer to home, the more than 2 percent undercount in Providence, amounting to

approximately 3,500 persons, and using that \$100 figure per person, meant a loss to the community of \$350,000, each year, for the decade. It is important to remember that the numbers from the 2000 census will be used until the next census in 2010.

This is why it's important that businesses, especially those located in cities with heavy minority populations and with a large minority employment, make their employees aware of the necessity to be counted. Not only will more federal dollars come in with a full count but there will also be a greater political representation based on larger numbers.

The Census Bureau is ready to help such businesses and all businesses to get this message out to their employees. Two Bureau offices are operating in the state—in Providence and Warwick. A Partnership Specialist is available to help businesses and other organizations establish programs, events and ideas as to how this should be done. This is one way for businesses to help the community as well as its employees.

The number of the Providence Office is 553-2030, and in Warwick 737-5807.

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## Commentary

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